3. An item dispensing system comprising:

a plurality of item dispensers located at different retail locations, each of the item dispensers comprising

a bill acceptor adapted to accept bills,

a fault store which stores

a fault threshold representing a stored number smaller than a number of bills storable in the bill acceptor, and

a fault being switchable to a first state in response to the bill acceptor storing a number of bills at least equal to the stored number, and

a controller in electrical communications with the item dispenser, the fault store and the bill acceptor, the controller producing an alarm in response to detecting only a deterioration of the fault; and

a host computer located geographically remotely from the retail locations, the host computer being in electrical communications with, and receiving the alarm from, the controller.

4. An item dispensing system comprising:

a plurality of item dispensers located at different retail locations, each of the item dispensers comprising

a coin acceptor adapted to accept coins,

a fault store which stores

a fault threshold representing a stored number smaller than a number of coins storable in the coin acceptor, and

a fault being switchable to a first state in response to the coin acceptor storing a number of coins at least equal to the stored number, and

a controller in electrical communications with the item dispenser, the fault store and the coin acceptor, the controller producing an alarm generated in response to detecting only a deterioration of the fualt; and

a host computer located geographically remotely from the retail locations, the host computer being in electrical communications with, and receiving the alarm from, the controller.

5. An item dispensing system comprising:

a plurality of item dispensers located at different retail locations, each of the item dispensers comprising

a cash acceptor,

a fault store for storing which stores

a fault threshold representing a stored value smaller than a desired total cash value to be stored in the cash acceptor, and

a fault being switchable to a first state in response to the cash acceptor storing a total cash value at least equal to the stored value; and

a controller in electrical communications with the item dispenser, the fault store and the cash acceptor, the controller producing an alarm in response to detecting only a deterioration of the fault; and

a host computer located geographically remotely from the retail locations, the host computer being in electrical communications with, and receiving the alarm from, the controller.

6. The item dispensing system of claim 5 further comprising a printer in electrical communications with the controller.

7. The item dispensing system of claim 5 wherein the controller produces an alarm in response to detecting the first state of the fault.

8. An item dispensing system comprising:

a plurality of item dispensers located at different retail locations, each of the item dispensers comprising

a fault store which stores

first and second fault thresholds representing respective first and second numbers smaller than a number of items dispensable by first and second item dispensers, respectively, and

first and second faults being switchable to a first state in response to the first and second item dispensers dispensing a number of items at least equal to the first and second numbers, respectively, and

a controller in electrical communications with the item dispenser and the fault store, the controller producing an alarm in response to detecting only a deterioration of both of the first and second fault states; and

a host computer located geographically remotely from the retail locations, the host computer being in electrical communications with, and receiving the alarm from, the controller.

9. The item dispensing system of claim **8** wherein the controller produces the alarm in response to the first and second faults being switched to their respective first and second fault states.

10. An item dispensing system comprising:

a plurality of item dispensers located at different retail locations, each of the item dispensers comprising

a fault store which stores

a plurality of fault thresholds, each fault threshold representing a first number smaller than a maximum number of items dispensable by a respective item dispenser, and

a plurality of faults, each fault being switchable to a respective first state in response to a respective item dispenser dispensing a number of items at least equal to the first number, and

a controller in electrical communications with the item dispenser and the fault store, the controller producing an alarm in response to detecting a predetermined number of the faults being switched to deteriorated states; and

a host computer located geographically remotely from the retail locations, the host computer being in electrical communications with, and receiving the alarm from, the controller.

11. The item dispensing system of claim **10** wherein the controller produces the alarm in response to the predetermined number of the faults being switched to their respective first states.

12. An item dispensing system comprising:

a plurality of item dispensers located at different retail locations, each of the item dispensers comprising

a fault store which stores a fault threshold and a fault; and

a controller which independently operates the item dispenser and providing data relating to items dispensed by the item dispenser, the controller being in electrical communications with the item dispenser and the fault store, and the controller producing an alarm in response to detecting a change of state of the fault;

a host computer located geographically remotely from the retail locations, the host computer being in electrical communications with, and receiving the alarm and the data relating to items dispensed by the item dispensers from the controller; and

another computer located geographically remotely from the retail locations and the host computer, the other computer in electrical communications with the host computer for receiving data relating to items dispensed at one of the retail locations.

13. The item dispensing system of claim 12 wherein the controller produces an alarm in response to detecting a deterioration of the fault.

14. The item dispensing system of claim 12 further comprising a fault store for storing

a fault threshold representing an operating state of the item dispenser, and

a fault having two states.

15. The item dispensing system of claim 14 wherein the controller

switches the fault to a first state in response to detecting the operating state of the item dispenser represented by the fault threshold, and

produces the alarm in response to detecting only a deterioration of the fault.

16. The item dispensing system of claim 15 wherein the controller produces the alarm in response to detecting the first state of the fault.

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